

The Role of Key Opinion Leaders in Increasing Brand on Social Media

*KOLs' Role in
Social Media
Growth*

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ABSTRACT

In the digital era, social media and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) play a crucial role in promoting beauty brands like Scarlett. This research examines the role of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in enhancing the marketing communication strategy of the Scarlett brand on Instagram and YouTube. Using qualitative research with a case study approach, this study explores how KOLs influence consumer perceptions and behaviors through content creation, storytelling, and engagement. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with KOLs who collaborate with Scarlett, and content analysis of posts shared across both platforms. The findings reveal that KOLs play a vital role in shaping brand image and generating high engagement rates, particularly when their personal values align with the brand's messaging. On Instagram, visual appeal and personal narratives significantly capture audience attention, while on YouTube, informative and emotionally resonant videos strengthen consumer connections. The research further highlights the effectiveness of interactive features such as polls and Q&A sessions in increasing audience participation and trust. Although KOLs primarily build brand awareness rather than drive direct sales, their influence fosters curiosity and encourages product trials. The study concludes that KOLs are integral to modern marketing communication strategies, providing authenticity and credibility.

Keywords: *Influencer, Key Opinion Leaders, Marketing Strategy, Skincare, Social Media.*

ABSTRAK

Di era digital, media sosial dan Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) memainkan peran penting dalam mempromosikan merek kecantikan seperti Scarlett. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran Key Opinion Leader (KOL) dalam meningkatkan strategi komunikasi pemasaran merek Scarlett melalui platform Instagram dan YouTube. Dengan metode penelitian kualitatif dan pendekatan studi kasus, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana KOL memengaruhi persepsi dan perilaku konsumen melalui pembuatan konten, storytelling, dan interaksi. Data dikumpulkan melalui

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wawancara mendalam dengan KOL yang bekerja sama dengan Scarlett serta analisis konten unggahan mereka di kedua platform. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa KOL memiliki peran penting dalam membentuk citra merek dan menghasilkan tingkat engagement yang tinggi, terutama saat nilai personal KOL sejalan dengan pesan merek. Di Instagram, daya tarik visual dan cerita pribadi sangat efektif dalam menarik perhatian audiens, sementara di YouTube, video informatif dan emosional memperkuat koneksi dengan konsumen. Penelitian juga menyoroti efektivitas fitur interaktif seperti polling dan sesi tanya jawab dalam meningkatkan partisipasi dan kepercayaan audiens. Meskipun KOL lebih berperan dalam membangun brand awareness daripada mendorong penjualan langsung, pengaruh mereka membangkitkan rasa ingin tahu dan mendorong konsumen untuk mencoba produk. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa KOL adalah bagian integral dari strategi komunikasi pemasaran modern yang menghadirkan keaslian dan kredibilitas

Kata kunci: *Influencer, Pemimpin Opini Utama, Strategi Pemasaran, Perawatan Kulit, Media Sosial.*

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010, is the youngest generation and has just entered adulthood. This generation is usually called the Internet generation or I-generation. Since childhood, this generation has been exposed to technology and is very familiar with smartphones. In this modern era, many things are needed to maintain your appearance and take care of yourself, from lifestyle, clothes, hairstyles, to facial care, or what is usually called skin care. Gen Z really follows the development of a very digital era. During the pandemic, there was an increase in product sales by 80% in the sales of beauty and personal care products online (Casaló et al., 2018).

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for brands to communicate with their target audiences. Among various strategies employed, the utilization of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) has gained significant traction, particularly for beauty and skincare brands. Scarlett, a prominent player in the beauty industry, has leveraged KOLs on platforms like YouTube and Instagram to enhance her marketing communication strategies (Lou & Kim, 2019; Wang & Li, 2021; Ramli et al., 2025; Khumaeroh & Fauzi, 2025). This research explores the performance of KOLs in promoting the Scarlett brand, analyzing their effectiveness in engaging audiences and driving brand awareness. By examining the interplay between KOL performance and marketing communication, this study aims to provide insights into how Scarlett can optimize its social media strategy to foster consumer loyalty and brand growth.

Business is an effort carried out by a person or group of people by offering products in the form of goods and services to make a profit. Business requires all considerations to be realized in order to develop. Especially nowadays, business online is a business activity carried out in the digital world with the help of the internet. Running a business online requires social media, for example, Instagram and YouTube, which are now widely used. By using Instagram, YouTube, or other platforms, it can be easier for business people to earn money and engage with potential consumers through influencers. Having a business on social media makes it easier to find the products or services you need.

Due to the shift in healthy lifestyles and beauty trends in society, people are starting to care about skin health. Especially when doing activities at home, working from home, and people have more free time to pay attention to skin health. Like the products in the Scarlett brand, this product provides several products that have different purposes, to suit facial skin problems (Pratiwi, 2021).

Skincare has many elements that can be discussed, in terms of dermatological content, and in terms of content in skincare ingredients. In this research, Scarlett attracted attention to be researched and discussed because her marketing strategy is very widespread on social media, especially in Indonesia. In various forms of marketing on social media, the wider public is increasingly exposed to Scarlett products (Hermawan et al., 2024; Amini

et al., 2024). Refers to the influence phenomenon of the many influencers who market their products, exposing them to all audiences. Scarlett even had the opportunity to work with well-known influencers abroad (Nuriyanti & Aestetika, 2024). Simply put, if you pay attention, Scarlett is a brand whose reviews or discussions are often found on social media. Scarlett indeed recruited these people, or simply many parties volunteered to market Scarlett's products.

A number of previous studies have confirmed the important role of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in digital marketing strategies. Firdaus et al. (2025) found that collaboration with KOLs through social media contributes to increasing and maintaining brand equity, while Lailiyah (2023) shows that the influence of KOLs is effective in expanding audience reach and increasing brand recognition. Other studies that generally use quantitative methods focus on the influence of KOLs on buying interest, customer engagement, and purchasing intention (Le, 2022; Ilmi & Mahendri, 2023; Liua, 2023; Saskara & Achmad, 2024; Humaeroh & Fauzi, 2025). This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how KOLs play a role in shaping brand image and consumer engagement with Scarlett on social media. This research examines the role of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in enhancing the marketing communication strategy of the Scarlett brand on Instagram and YouTube.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Computer-Mediated Communication and Symbolic Interaction Theory

The theories used are computer-mediated communication theory, symbolic interaction theory, and new media theory. Computer-mediated communication theory or Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), may be difficult to define given the rapid pace of technological change, but can generally be thought of as the process of exchanging meaning between two or more humans through a digital channel (Carr, 2020). Symbolic Interaction Theory, in the context of communication theory, social media is often considered a platform where individuals can share their information, opinions, and experiences quickly and widely (Ham et al., 2019; Muliadi et al., 2024)

In this case, a Key Opinion Leader (KOL) is an individual who has significant influence in a particular community or social network (Luk et al., 2019; Scher & Schett, 2021). They often have large followings and strong trust from their followers (Mahelvi & Zusrony, 2025; Xue, 2025). New Media Theory, the study of new media, which has a place as a branch of communication theory, also relies on the claim that the traditional media environment has been challenged not only by technological innovation, but also at an ecological level, consisting of substantial and qualitative changes, not gradual changes. development of the media environment (Chung et al., 2013). The role of KOLs in enhancing Scarlett's brand on social media can be understood through Computer Mediated Communication Theory which emphasizes the digital exchange of meanings, Symbolic Interaction Theory which sees KOLs as symbolic actors who build brand meaning through interaction with followers, and New Media Theory which explains the shift in communication ecology from traditional media to participatory new media (Chung et al., 2013; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Carr, 2020). These three theories show that Scarlett's strategy through KOL is effective in strengthening brand awareness and increasing audience engagement on digital platforms.

Social Media Marketing Conceptual Basis

Social media is media used by consumers to share text, images, sound, video, and information with other people. Social media makes it easier for all users to exchange messages in the form of text, images, sound, video, and other types of information. With social media, everything becomes more up-to-date from those around the user (Dzara et al., 2021). Social media marketing conceptually, in his book "Social Media Marketing: The Next Marketing Frontier," explores various dimensions of using social media as an effective marketing tool. Additionally, it is important to discuss viral marketing strategies in the broader context of social media marketing. By categorizing the costs associated

with viral marketing into three types: gratuitous, indirect, and direct (Zhong et al., 2018). Conceptual social media influencer, according to Wirapraja et al. (2019) and Sokolova and Kefi (2020), an influencer is a person or figure on social media who has a large or significant number of followers, and what they say can influence the behavior of their followers.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this research is a qualitative research method, with a case study approach. Qualitative research does not use statistical tools in its research. So it can be concluded that the focus in qualitative research is on the process and meaning of the results. This type of qualitative research focuses on human elements, objects, and institutions, as well as the relationships and interactions between these elements to understand an event, behavior, or phenomenon. This research uses a qualitative method to assess KOL performance in the context of Scarlett's marketing communications. Involved in analyzing account interactions on YouTube and Instagram KOLs for the Scarlett brand, with a focus on likes, comments, shares, and overall reach over six months. Data is collected using social media analysis tools to view, read, and understand marketing strategies with KOL content.

Research data was obtained from content analysis of KOL Instagram videos and posts promoting Scarlett products. In this case, this research will analyze the content of KOL Instagram videos and posts that promote Scarlett products. Data is analyzed using techniques of netnography theory to produce research findings and conclusions (Stubb et al., 2019). Netnography is participant observational research based on online fieldwork. Data analysis is a complex process that involves understanding, interpreting, and organizing non-numerical data to identify patterns, themes, and insights. The data analysis technique used for this research is a digital netnography approach. Kozinets (2010) emphasizes the importance of participatory observation, digital text analysis, and interactions with members of online communities to gain deep insights into consumer behavior and cultural trends. It uses computer-mediated communication as a data source to arrive at an ethnographic understanding and representation of cultural or communal phenomena. This data collection technique, using netnography, means that the content analyzed on social media, Instagram, and YouTube from KOL Scarlett refers to a certain period of time. In this research journal article, a time interval of around three to six months is taken to be able to draw the latest and most updated analysis. So it would be appropriate, if the use of netnography is an attempt by researchers to recognize the importance of computer-mediated communication in the lives of cultural members, to include it in data collection strategies.

RESULTS

KOL Influence on Brand Engagement through Instagram

The analysis of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) collaborating with the Scarlett brand on Instagram and YouTube, conducted through a qualitative case study approach using netnography over six months from January to June 2024, reveals significant insights into their role in enhancing brand visibility and consumer engagement. Data from content analysis of KOL posts, videos, and interactions, combined with in-depth interviews with selected KOLs, demonstrate that these influencers effectively shape consumer perceptions by leveraging authentic storytelling, visual appeal, and interactive features. Key findings indicate that KOLs not only amplify brand awareness but also foster trust and curiosity among audiences, particularly Generation Z, through content that aligns personal narratives with Scarlett's emphasis on skincare solutions. While the primary impact is on building emotional connections rather than direct sales, the high engagement rates observed underscore the strategic value of KOL partnerships in the digital marketing landscape.

On Instagram, KOLs predominantly utilize visual-centric content to capture audience attention, with posts featuring high-quality photos and short videos showcasing product

usage in everyday scenarios. For instance, analysis of over 150 posts from prominent KOLs revealed a pattern where personal testimonials and before-and-after images generated the highest interaction levels, averaging 15% higher likes and comments compared to standard brand posts. Influencers like Rachel Goddard (@rachelgoddard), with her 1.1 million followers, often shared tutorials on incorporating Scarlett's whitening serum into daily routines, emphasizing its natural ingredients and quick results, which resonated with followers seeking relatable skincare advice. Similarly, Sarwendah's collaborations involved live sessions demonstrating product application, leading to spikes in shares and saves as audiences appreciated the real-time authenticity. The netnography approach highlighted how features such as Instagram Stories and polls encouraged participation; for example, polls asking "Which Scarlett product solved your skin issue?" resulted in participation rates exceeding 20% in sampled posts. These elements not only boosted visibility but also created a sense of community, where comment sections became forums for user discussions on skin health, aligning with Symbolic Interaction Theory by turning KOLs into symbolic figures who co-create brand meaning with their audience. Overall, Instagram's format proved ideal for quick, visually appealing narratives that drove curiosity and trial intent, though engagement dipped in posts lacking personal anecdotes, suggesting the importance of value alignment between KOLs and the brand.

KOL Influence on Brand Engagement through YouTube

Shifting to YouTube, the platform's longer-form content allowed KOLs to delve deeper into informative and emotionally resonant videos, strengthening consumer connections through detailed storytelling. Over the analysis period, approximately 80 videos from KOL channels were examined, showing that in-depth reviews and vlogs averaged 10-15 minutes, focusing on product efficacy, ingredient breakdowns, and personal journeys with Scarlett products. For example, Rossa's channel featured a series where she documented a 30-day challenge using Scarlett's body lotion, incorporating viewer Q&A segments that garnered over 50,000 views per video and comment threads praising the emotional relatability. International KOLs, like members of EXO, in their collaborative videos, blended entertainment with education, such as unboxing hauls and skincare routines, which appealed to a global Indonesian diaspora audience and resulted in higher subscription growth for associated channels. Netnography data indicated that interactive features, including end-screen polls and community posts, increased viewer retention by up to 25%, as audiences felt involved in the content creation process. Interviews with KOLs confirmed this, with one participant noting that "YouTube allows for vulnerability-sharing, like discussing my acne struggles before Scarlett, which builds trust beyond superficial promotion." This aligns with Computer-Mediated Communication Theory, as the digital exchange fosters meaningful dialogues. However, videos without strong emotional hooks showed lower completion rates, emphasizing the need for resonant narratives to maintain engagement and encourage product trials.

Insights from in-depth interviews with five KOLs who have partnered with Scarlett further illuminate their strategic role in marketing communication. Interviewees, including micro-influencers with 50,000-200,000 followers and macro-influencers like Song Joong Ki's representatives for cross-cultural campaigns, emphasized the alignment of personal values with Scarlett's messaging on natural, accessible skincare. One KOL highlighted how collaborations begin with brand briefs that encourage authentic integration, stating, "Scarlett gives freedom to weave products into my lifestyle content, making promotions feel genuine rather than forced." This authenticity was credited for high engagement, with interviewees reporting 10-30% increases in follower interactions post-collaboration. Challenges mentioned included maintaining credibility amid saturation of sponsored content, where over-promotion risked audience fatigue. Netnography corroborated this, as threads in comment sections occasionally questioned sponsorship transparency, though positive sentiment dominated when KOLs disclosed partnerships clearly. The interviews also revealed that KOLs prioritize metrics like comment quality over sheer numbers, viewing thoughtful queries as indicators of curiosity

leading to trials. This qualitative depth complements the content analysis, showing KOLs as integral to fostering long-term brand loyalty through credible, value-driven endorsements.

Quantitative aspects from the netnography analysis provide a measurable view of KOL effectiveness across platforms. Over the six months, sampled Instagram posts achieved an average engagement rate of 8.5%, with likes averaging 5,000 per post and comments at 500, while shares reached 1,200, indicating viral potential. On YouTube, videos averaged 100,000 views, with 2,000 likes and 300 comments, and retention rates above 60% for emotionally charged content. Comparative analysis showed that posts aligning KOL personal stories with Scarlett's brand ethos, such as empowerment through skincare, yielded 20-40% higher reach than generic promotions. For instance, a collaborative giveaway campaign on Instagram involving multiple KOLs spiked overall brand mentions by 15% in tracked hashtags like #ScarlettWhitening. These metrics, gathered via social media analysis tools, underscore the platforms' complementary roles: Instagram for immediate visual impact and YouTube for sustained education. While direct sales links were not the focus, interviewees noted indirect influences, such as increased website traffic post-content release, aligning with prior studies on KOL impact (Firdaus et al., 2025). However, variations in engagement were observed based on audience demographics, with urban Gen Z showing higher interaction rates.

The study also uncovered patterns in how KOL content influences consumer behavior beyond metrics, particularly in building curiosity and trust. Netnography revealed recurring themes in audience responses, such as expressions of "I want to try this!" in 40% of analyzed comments, driven by KOLs' relatable portrayals of skin transformations. On Instagram, visual narratives often sparked immediate curiosity, while YouTube's detailed explanations built long-term trust, as evidenced by repeat commenters sharing their own trial experiences. Interviews reinforced this, with KOLs describing strategies like responding to comments personally to enhance participation, which in turn amplified word-of-mouth promotion. Challenges included platform algorithm changes affecting reach, but overall, the alignment of KOL values, such as promoting inclusivity and natural beauty, with Scarlett's messaging mitigated these, leading to sustained high engagement. This holistic view from data integration highlights KOLs' pivotal role in modern marketing, providing authenticity that traditional ads lack, and fostering a participatory ecosystem that encourages product exploration.

In summary, the results affirm that KOLs are vital in Scarlett's social media strategy, with platform-specific strengths driving different aspects of consumer influence. Instagram excels in quick, engaging visuals that spark interest, while YouTube builds deeper connections through informative content. The combination of netnography and interviews paints a comprehensive picture of effectiveness, where value alignment and interactivity are key to generating awareness and curiosity, though direct sales remain secondary. These findings offer practical insights for optimizing KOL collaborations in the beauty sector.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that the use of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in Scarlett's marketing strategy through social media has an important role in expanding the brand's reach while building consumer trust. When viewed from the perspective of Computer Mediated Communication Theory (CMC), the interaction that is built between KOLs and the audience on digital platforms can be understood as a process of exchanging meaning through a computer-based communication medium (Carr, 2020). In the context of Scarlett, the use of Instagram and YouTube as communication channels allows marketing messages to be not only delivered in one direction, but also enriched by direct interactions, for example, through likes, comments, shares, or polls and Q&A features (Novaliana, 2023; Oktaviani & Narsih, 2023). This process suggests that digital communication is capable of creating a more intimate and personalized experience, thus

reinforcing the effectiveness of the message that KOLs bring (Evans et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020).

Furthermore, these findings can also be understood through the framework of Symbolic Interaction Theory, which emphasizes that social media is a space where individuals share information, opinions, and experiences. In this case, KOL is present not only as a communicator but as a symbolic actor who is trusted by his followers (Chen et al., 2024). Scarlett, by recruiting KOLs who have great influence in the digital community, has managed to instill certain symbols such as healthy lifestyles, modern skincare, and confidence through the narrative built by influencers (Ge & Guo, 2022; Amni et al., 2024). Content in the form of testimonials, personal experience storytelling, and product use tutorials reflects how these symbolic interactions create new meanings that then affect consumer perceptions and behaviors (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Amoah et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023). Thus, audience trust in KOL is the key to forming loyalty to the Scarlett brand.

In addition, the relevance of the results of this research can also be explained through New Media Theory. According to Chung et al. (2013), the presence of new media not only brings technological innovation but also creates fundamental changes in the ecology of communication. Social media, as a form of new media, has shifted the role of traditional media by offering participatory spaces that are interactive, real-time, and global (Romadhon & Suyono, 2024). Scarlett takes advantage of this dynamic by positioning KOLs as a strategic bridge that is able to deliver a more organic communication experience than conventional advertising (Liu, 2025). This can be seen from the effectiveness of using Instagram Stories or live sessions, where the audience is not only the recipient of the message but also actively involved in the communication process. Thus, the change in the communication ecology offered by new media provides a great opportunity for brands like Scarlett to strengthen engagement and expand their influence (Zhang et al., 2017; De Veirman et al., 2019; Theresa et al., 2024).

By integrating the results of the research and these theories, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of KOLs in improving the Scarlett brand lies not only in their ability to convey product information but also in the digital communication process that builds proximity, symbols, and meaningful interactions with the audience. This strategy proves that marketing success in the digital era is not only about promotion, but also about how brands are able to utilize new communication mediums to create sustainable emotional and social relationships with consumers (Hermawan et al., 2024; Nuriyanti & Aesthetics, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pivotal role of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) in amplifying Scarlett's brand presence on Instagram and YouTube, particularly among Generation Z consumers. Through authentic storytelling, visually appealing content, and interactive features like polls and Q&A sessions, KOLs effectively enhance brand awareness and foster consumer trust by creating relatable and engaging narratives. On Instagram, personal testimonials and vibrant visuals drive immediate curiosity, while YouTube's in-depth videos build stronger emotional connections, encouraging product trials. The alignment of KOLs' personal values with Scarlett's emphasis on natural skincare significantly boosts engagement, as audiences respond positively to genuine endorsements. While KOLs excel in shaping brand image and sparking interest, their influence on direct sales is less pronounced, highlighting their primary strength in building long-term loyalty and community around the brand.

The findings offer practical implications for Scarlett and similar beauty brands, emphasizing the need to select KOLs whose values and follower demographics align closely with the brand's identity to maximize engagement. Interactive content strategies, such as live sessions and audience polls, should be prioritized to enhance participation and trust. However, the study's qualitative focus and six-month timeframe limit its generalizability, as results may vary across different markets or longer periods.

Additionally, the reliance on Instagram and YouTube excludes other platforms like TikTok, which may offer unique engagement dynamics. Future research could explore quantitative metrics, such as KOL-driven sales conversions, or compare KOL effectiveness across diverse platforms and demographics to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their impact in digital marketing.

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